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DE RUEHAM #4166/01 2840932  
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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0558  
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0130  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 004166

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STATE PLEASE PASS TO USTR (DONNELLY, KARESH, ROSENBERG)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2017  
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: STRIKES OF BENGALI WORKERS CONTINUE IN JORDAN'S  
GARMENT FACTORIES

REF: A. AMMAN 4060  
[1](#)B. EASON-BRIGGS-DEMARIA-BROWN-PISANI 10/1/07 E-MAIL

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale, For Reasons 1.4 B, D

[1](#)1. (SBU) Representatives from Jordan's Ministry of Labor (MOL) and the Bangladeshi Embassy in Jordan tried to facilitate October 8 negotiations between management at the Cotton Craft factory in al-Tajamouat Qualifying Industrial Zone (QIZ) and Bengali workers who have been on strike since mid-September (Reftels). Both the Labor Officer at the Bangladeshi Embassy (Yousaf Rahman) and the Head of the MOL Inspection Team Amin Wreidat expressed frustration to Econoff with the workers' refusal to reach a settlement.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Wreidat explained that when the new management took over the factory in June 2007, an agreement was made with the workers to pay back wages of 185JD (\$237) in installments every ten days. Three installments of 50JD (\$70) had already been paid when the workers went on strike, leaving only a small outstanding balance. Workers have now presented a new claim that the old management of the factory also failed to pay them 95JD (\$134) for their first month of work after arriving in Jordan. In order to end the strike and fill pending orders, the new owner, Omar Omari, reportedly agreed to pay the additional month wages as a concession, with the caveat that the money would again need to be distributed in installments due to a lack of liquidity caused by the strike. Workers refused the offer. Rahman and Wreidat also said that employees refused to get food and water offered in the canteen, claiming that they did not trust the management. Workers have stated that the only acceptable solution is a transfer to another factory.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Rahman reported that when the Consul General at the Bangladeshi Embassy tried to leave the factory during the discussions to attend another meeting, the workers blockaded the door, and eventually attacked him, ripping his suit. Wreidat noted that the Jordanian police ended up using tear gas to disperse the workers and get the Consul General to safety. Rahman indicated that the Bangladeshi Embassy would be requesting guidance from Dhaka, given that such actions against Bangladeshi Embassy officials are punishable under Bangladesh law by up to 5 years jail time. Rahman also advised the Jordanian government that the police could arrest the workers. Wreidat held a press conference October 10 explaining the current situation, and intends to write the Ministry of Interior to request initiation of the proper legal proceedings against a group of about 20 workers who incited others to limit the freedom of movement of the Bengali diplomat.

¶4. (SBU) Rahman added that a group of Cotton Craft workers had met with the Bangladeshi Ambassador to Jordan only a few days prior. The Bangladeshi Ambassador urged the employees to come first to the Bangladeshi Embassy to seek assistance before going on strike. Likewise, the Ministry of Labor had delivered the same message. NOTE: The workers apparently did not provide the required 14 days prior notification of the strike, which makes it "illegal" under the Jordanian labor law. END NOTE.

¶5. (SBU) Wreidat also noted that the strike of Bengali workers at the CCKM factory in al-Tajamouat QIZ had not ceased, with workers continuing to threaten any fellow colleagues who spoke with the Ministry of Labor (Ref A). On October 9, one of the owners from another factory -- Caliber Company in Al-Hassan QIZ in Irbid -- also met with Wreidat about an incident in his factory in which 550 workers held his partner for five hours, threatening physical abuse until he agreed to fire four supervisors. According to Wreidat, the partner is now afraid to return to the factory for fear of violence.

¶6. (C) Wreidat expressed concern that the Bengali workers seem to be following a trend of using violence in factories. He said that the MOL does not want workers at other factories to believe that such tactics are effective in obtaining a transfer or having other demands met, particularly when not legitimate. Both Rahman and Wreidat noted that the Cotton Craft management may be a little "slippery" as well, but the Bengali workers are being particularly uncooperative with both Jordanian and Bangladeshi government officials who could help ensure that the factory lives up to its agreements. Wreidat wanted to make sure, in particular, that audiences in the U.S. understood that some of the workers' claims may be aimed at garnering sympathy and do not necessarily present an accurate picture of the situation.

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Hale